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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an evaluation of the Peer Coaching Seminar Course offered through the Peer Coaching Rural Inservice Model (PRISM) project at the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities. This online course was designed to help rural teachers learn both peer coaching and classroom management skills. Twenty first- or second-year teachers who had completed the course responded to a questionnaire that addressed implementation of the peer coaching process including implementation of all 10 steps, environmental changes, lesson structure and delivery, teaching effectiveness, information searches, peer consultations, and student behavior. Major findings indicated: (1) 65% of respondents continue to use some or all of the components of the peer coaching process up to 2 years after taking the course; (2) 70% of teachers reported positive environmental changes and half reported changes in lesson delivery and structure; (3) the teachers did not regularly use the Internet or the project's Web site for information on classroom management issues; and (4) the overall impact of the course on teachers was positive, with many teachers emphasizing increased self-examination. Effects of the course on student behavior were unclear. (DB)

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PRISM Project Technical Report #3

P R I S M

Follow-up of Online Instruction:

Effectiveness of Peer Coaching Seminar Course

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This paper presents an evaluation of the Peer Coaching Seminar Course offered through the Peer Coaching Rural In-Service Model (PRISM) project at the ND Center for Persons with Disabilities at Minot State University. This online course was designed as the initial training component of the PRISM project. Rural teachers took the course to learn both peer coaching and classroom management skills. It was hypothesized that when teachers used the peer coaching process, they would be able to critically analyze their classroom instructional skills and then continue to address classroom problem behaviors.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the peer-coaching course for those who had completed it. There were a few topics we were curious about. Specifically, we wanted to know if those who had completed the course had since implemented peer coaching in their classroom. We also wanted to find out how the classroom environment had changed, how students' behaviors had changed, and how the peer-coaching course had impacted teacher effectiveness.

METHOD

Forty teachers who completed the course (10-first year, and 30-second year) were randomly selected from the 108 teachers who participated in PRISM. Postcards were sent to these forty teachers notifying them of the upcoming survey. They were asked to respond and tell us know how they would like to receive the survey to make it as convenient for them as possible. They could complete the survey either by phone, e-mail, or mail. There were no initial responses. E-mails and phone calls were then made to contact the teachers.

RESULTS

Because of circumstances such as teachers moving, having dropped the class, or were unable to be contacted, only 29 of the 40 teachers received the questionnaire. Of the 29 questionnaires that went out, 23 were returned (return rate of 79.3%). However only 20 questionnaires were completed and usable. Of the 20 completed surveys, 10 were completed over the phone, five by e-mail, and five by mail. Figure 1 (next page) shows the questions and results of the yes-no responses by the teachers. More detailed descriptions of the teachers' responses then follows.

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QUESTION	YES	NO
Have you implemented the 10 Step Peer Coaching Process in your classroom since the completion of the peer-coaching course?	65%n = 13	35%n = 7
Has the environment of your classroom changed?	70%n = 14	30%n = 6
Has the structure and delivery of your lessons in the classroom changed?	55%n = 11	45%n = 9
Has the peer-coaching technique changed your teaching effectiveness?	80%n = 16	20%n = 4
Have you researched new sites or sources for information?	30%n = 6	70%n = 14
Have you consulted with your peers for ideas?	90%n = 18	10%n = 2
Have you seen changes in your students' behavior since the completion of the peer-coaching course?	50%n = 10	50%n = 10
What is your overall opinion of the peer-coaching course? How has it helped you as a teacher?	95%n = 19	5%n = 1

Figure 1. Questions and teacher responses.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PEER COACHING PROCESS

Teachers were asked if they had implemented the 10-step peer coaching process in their classroom, and what areas they were concerned with. Thirteen teachers said they had implemented the process in their classroom. Most of them hadn't used it formally, performing all ten steps, but they had their peers come into their classroom to help them with their problems and concerns. Seven of the teachers replied that they hadn't used peer coaching in their classroom. The following are some responses from the teachers.

Those who have implemented the peer coaching process:

- I have had another peer watch my class as I am teaching to find behaviors that were upsetting other classmates.
- I was trying to find ways to make my teaching more student led rather than my doing the talking and them the listening.
- Yes—discipline issues—having control of the classroom.
- Yes—ADHD student—wanted to see if she was focusing all of her attention on him instead of the class; it was very helpful.
- Yes—keeping the students on task.
- Yes—was having problems with a large class size for the few amount of computers available.

Those who hadn't implemented peer coaching in the classroom:

- No, I changed schools and haven't been able to convince the administration that peer coaching is a good idea.
- No—mainly because of lack of time. We all have an overwhelming amount of content to teach.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES.

Teachers were asked if the environment of the teachers' classrooms had changed at all. Of the 20 teachers who responded, 14 said their classroom environment had improved and eight said there was no change. The following are some responses from the teachers.

Teachers who had noticed a change:

- Change was positive, I'm more aware of seating arrangements affecting the classroom environment.
- It's less stressful; the other teacher gave me some insight.
- I have more classroom control with less effort.
- There is not as much goofing around at center time.
- Students are more respectful, quieter, and under more control.
- Yes—we are more focused on tasks they need to successfully complete.

Teachers who didn't notice a change:

- No significant change.
- About the same, I feel more comfortable and confident.
- I haven't noticed a change, but I have a really difficult class this year. I'm anxious to take other PRISM classes. Hopefully things will change.

LESSON STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY.

Teachers were asked whether the structure and delivery of the lessons in the classroom had changed. The responses to this question were 11 yes and 9 no responses. The following are a few examples.

Teachers responding yes:

- Not quite so rigid, go with the flow more.
- I have totally changed my English classes. I now plan short activities that will take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. In order to do this, I have to be prepared for an entire semester so that I make sure I have gotten everything covered. I still teach the same things, only the presentation is different.
- Shortened delivery of lessons.
- It has changed, but not only from the peer-coaching course. I'm enrolled in the MSU math graduate program. Becoming more educated has helped.
- More hands on time rather than me talking. However, that also involved the purchase of some new materials and equipment, so the change is coming slowly.

Teachers responding no:

- Hasn't changed much.
- About the same, but I'm more aware of the students' needs. I try to use more hands on.

- I have switched from 6th grade to kindergarten, so it's hard to tell.
- Hasn't changed.
- No—about the same.

TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS.

The fourth question on the survey asked the teachers whether the peer-coaching course had changed their teaching effectiveness. Over half of the recipients of this survey said it did, with 16 saying yes, and 4 saying no. The following are some examples.

Teachers responding yes:

- I feel that I am a more effective teacher since the students' test scores are higher and there are fewer discipline incidents.
- I'm not as nervous with other people in the room. I'm more effective with others in the room.
- I put more thought into planning and delivery.
- Made me more aware of weak areas.
- It enhanced my teaching by enabling me to look at my teaching with different perspectives.

Teachers responding no:

- I don't think it did change.
- Hasn't changed much.

INFORMATION SEARCHES.

Teachers were asked if they had researched new sites and sources for information, and if so, for what types of issues. The results told us that most teachers are not looking for new sources for information. Fourteen teachers responded no, while only 6 responded yes.

Teachers who responded yes:

- Yes—bringing more technology into the classroom and sites on innovative teaching.
- Yes—I am constantly looking for new ideas on the Internet. These range from instructional tools to classroom curriculum.
- Yes—mostly for behavior problems.
- Yes—classroom management issues on the Internet.

Teachers responding no:

- I have not. I mostly use who is in my building and what I have at my fingertips.
- No, kept the old ones on 'Favorites'.
- Not yet.

PEER CONSULTATIONS.

Question six asked if teachers had consulted their peers for ideas. The majority of teachers responded yes; only two teachers responded to this question with a no.

Teachers responding yes:

- I have several music teachers I visit with regularly to exchange ideas and equipment.
- I visit with peers more about behavior issues.
- As a whole, the school talks a lot about a variety of ideas, like classroom management.
- I am constantly consulting with my peers. We share classroom-management techniques, web sites, and other tools.
- Yes—for effective instructional strategies.

Teachers responding no:

- Both simply said no.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR.

Teachers were asked if they had seen a change in the students' behavior since the completion of the course. Ten teachers responded yes and ten teachers responded no. Typical responses included:

Teachers responding yes:

- They know they can't bug me so easily and don't push my buttons as much.
- They are more attentive since I have picked up the pace.
- They pay more attention because everything's ready. There are less distractions and the students are more prepared.
- The students' test scores are higher and there are fewer discipline incidents.
- I could really see a difference. The peers off the net helped a lot.
- I have seen a lot of change, especially in centers, the area I worked on the most for certain changes.

Teachers responding no:

- I honestly don't know that I see a lot of difference in behavior—most of my students are generally pretty well behaved so behavior hasn't been a real problem.
- Not as much in my students as myself.
- They are in a different class, so I don't see them at all.
- Every year is a new group of students, so it is hard to judge whether it is a change in my teaching or a change in the students.
- No significant changes.

OVERALL OPINION.

The final question addressed the teachers' overall opinions of the peer coaching course and how it helped them. Only one teacher had a negative answer. Most of the teachers had very positive responses.

Positive responses:

- The course was good. It gave me self-confidence and I don't worry about things so much.
- I liked it. As I stated before, it enabled me to look at things at a different perspective. I also liked it because I need an occasional reminder of how I can teach effectively even though I exhibited it at other times in my teaching experience.
- This was an excellent course. It helped me to be able to go to peers and also by learning to talk by not putting students down. It also helped me be prepared.
- This has been a real helpful class. It was difficult in the use of the computers, but once I understood the computer techniques, I felt more comfortable.
- I liked the course and feel that the previous answers show how it has changed my teaching.
- I guess I think there is a lot more of it [peer coaching] done on an informal basis than we really realize. You don't always go through the steps—but there are a lot of ideas and information being shared out there each day that is beneficial to teachers and students.
- This was a valuable course. I learned how to take an online class. I connected with the teachers in the school and conversed more with peers. I found that everyone has similar problems. I'm excited about taking two future PRISM courses.

- Any course helps improve teaching methods. I'm satisfied with the course. Overall, I'm more aware of different available options.
- I really thought this was a good course. I got people in to help me teach. Having someone else in the classroom seeing what I couldn't is helpful.
- Some things were very useful.
- It has given me some new ideas.
- I liked it a lot. Partly because it wasn't real time consuming, but I still learned a lot. It made me aware of things and I've tried more strategies to fix my problems.
- I thought the course was wonderful. I think the program should come in as an in-service. It was really eye opening. It helped me to be able to turn to others more.
- I thought this was a good course, I learned a lot. I became a more effective teacher. I am more able to go to others for ideas and also research more for ideas. I used to keep my door shut whenever I taught, but now I feel more comfortable and confident around others.
- I thought the course was valuable. It has given me a way to try and evaluate my teaching in a non-threatening context.
- It was great!
- Made me aware of my individual teaching practices.
- I always hope that everything I do helps me with teaching, so I suppose the answer would be yes.
- I liked it. I would like to adapt this to non-disciplinary issues in my classroom.

Negative responses

- I didn't feel this was a very valuable course. So many of the suggestions, I was already aware of. Consulting a specialist was hard to do when the problem was just for one student. I didn't know where to turn to in a rural school. I think it would have been useful to have been able to contact other teachers in other schools involved in the program.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This evaluation was conducted to determine the impact of the Peer Coaching Seminar course on PRISM participants. One is cautioned about overextending the results of this evaluation as a rather small sample (n=20) of the total number of program participants (n=108) was included in this study.

Several general conclusions may be drawn from our results. First, for our respondents, 65% of the teachers continue to use some or all of the components of the peer coaching process up to two years after taking the course. This is important since the peer coaching process was included in the project as a sustainability factor. We believed that working on-site with a peer would greatly enhance the chance that teachers would continue to examine classroom issues. The data suggest that several teachers are doing that. In fact, 95 % of the teachers regularly consult with their peers regarding classroom behavior.

The second conclusion pertains to interventions that the teachers implemented. Seventy percent of the teachers reported positive environmental changes as a result of their involvement in the class, and nearly half have changed their lesson delivery and structure. The PRISM project has emphasized simple and preliminary methods to impact classroom behavior, with environmental modifications and lesson delivery the two most frequently recommended methods. It appears, again, that the course successfully addressed these topics.

Third, teachers did not regularly use the Internet in general, or the project website specifically, to obtain information or classroom management issues. While these respondents did not give reasons for not conducting further searches, previous participants cited time as a major factor in this area. Teachers often had little free time during work to access a computer or to conduct detailed searches to answer their immediate questions.

The fourth conclusion addresses teacher impact. It was clear that most of the respondents felt they were more effective teachers as a result of the Peer Coaching Seminar. Teachers reported that the introspective components of the course (e.g., initial classroom observations, classroom data, and discussions with peers) made them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Several teachers reported that the self-examinations helped them focus on needed improvements in their teaching skills.

The PRISM staff were interested in the potential impact of the course on student behavior. The results of this study lead us to conclude that we still have problems in analyzing this aspect of the course. Obviously, making a link between taking a course and observing changes in student behavior is a tenuous correlation at best. Other external factors such as school-wide discipline approaches, impact of other teachers and students, and home influences likely effect behavior as well. However, the present data suggest that teachers are seeing some improvement in student behavior and are attributing it to their participation in the online course.

Finally, 19 of 20 teachers rated the overall impact of the course positively. Again, many teacher comments emphasized their self-examination and the impact of their teaching on student behavior. They also stated that they felt they had more options for dealing with student behavior.

SUMMARY

The results of this preliminary evaluation are encouraging, especially given the professional development constraints of many rural schools. Often these districts are faced with money, time and location limitations that impact on access. Also, since many teacher in-service activities are episodic and isolated, their effect is limited. The data from this evaluation suggest that an online course can produce both teacher and student impact that is sustained for up to two years.

Future work should more closely examine whether the teacher reports of teaching effectiveness truly occur, and what the actual impacts are on student behavior. In addition, there should be an examination of the financial impact on a school, and on which components of the peer-coaching model produce the most teachers and student changes.

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